

Foster Refutes Green Claim Of Aid by A. F. of L. Chiefs In the 1919 Steel Campaign

The reactionary leadership of the American Federation of Labor contributed only "sabotage and opposition" to the great steel campaign of 1919, William Z. Foster, leader of that campaign, stated yesterday in refuting allegations of William Green that the A. F. of L. leadership had supported that drive.

When asked about Green's statement on the 1919 campaign by a representative of the Daily Worker, Foster said:

"In this morning's papers, Mr. Green, President of the American Federation of Labor is quoted as asserting that the A. F. of L. was instrumental in giving several hundreds of thousands of dollars to the 1919 steel drive, leaving the impression that the A. F. of L. top leaders actively supported that campaign.

Brazen Falsehood

"I wish to characterize this as a brazen falsehood. The attitude of the A. F. of L. toward the 1919 steel campaign was one of sabotage and opposition, even as it is now towards

the present drive being conducted by the C.I.O. under the leadership of John L. Lewis."

"What did actually take place in 1919, so far as the top leadership of the A. F. of L. was concerned?" was the next question asked the man who had led the great revolt of more than 300,000 workers against the steel trusts.

"The fact is," he continued, "that the A. F. of L. did not give a ten-cent piece to start the organizing work; it did not make the slightest effort to raise any money, nor did initiate organization work for the campaign nor outline the plant. After the campaign got under way, in

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spite of the A. F. of L. top leadership indifference and sabotage, gradually we managed to wheedle out of them a few organizers, largely of the chair-warming variety. Throughout the campaign of organization, they gave no money whatsoever to the movement.

Funds 14 Months Late

"The only important sums of money that came through the hands of the A. F. of L. for the 1919 steel movement, came when the strike had begun some fourteen months after the initiation of the organization drive.

"When the strike took place, we pressed the reluctant Gompers to issue a general appeal for funds to the trade union movement. But the A. F. of L. did nothing more than just issue the call in a routine way. To raise the funds, it was necessary that the National Steel Committee recruit a corps of solicitors and put them to work in the field. The A. F. of L. apparatus never stirred itself to help in the matter. As it was, we managed to collect \$418,141.14 for strike relief. Of this \$200,000 came from three needle trades unions and a couple of other progressive organizations in New York. The A. F. of L. leaders are entitled to practically zero so far as credit for financial support in the 1919 strike is concerned. It is hard to conceive of them doing anything less than they did."

On the impotent role of the right wing leadership of the A. F. of L., Foster concluded emphatically:

"The right wing of the A. F. of L., represented in 1919 by Gompers and in 1936 by Green, never could or would organize the steel workers. They have never produced either plans or funds then or now. They have never initiated a serious steel campaign. The task of organizing the steel workers in 1919 just as it is in 1936, was the task of the progressive wing of the A. F. of L. and the work now also must be carried through in the face of the sabotage by the right reactionaries; who, by their course of action, always give objective support to the steel bosses. The less Mr. Green has to say about the role of the A. F. of L. general office in the 1919 steel campaign, the better it will be for the honor of the trade union movement."